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MEMORANDUM

To: City Planning Commission
Date: December 5, 1966

From: Division of Operations Planning
Subject: Report on Hart Island

Appended is a report on Hart Island prepared by this Division in fulfillment of Mayor Lindsay's request to the City Planning Commission for a study of the use of the Island.

The major staff recommendation is for the re-use of Hart Island and its available facilities as a rehabilitation center for homeless men. This would be an integral part of the Operation Bowery Program within the Department of Welfare.

The proposal to use Hart Island as a residential and training institution for homeless men has the approval of the Operation Bowery Steering Committee which consists of City officials, the Operation Bowery Advisory Citizens' Committee, Mr. Morris Chase, the Executive Director of Operation Bowery and Mr. Kelsky, of the Deputy Mayor-Administrator's office who has responsibility for health and welfare activities.

After the completion of our study of Hart Island and the preparation of the appended report, we were informed that the City's Coordinator of Narcotics has expressed interest in using the Island as a narcotics treatment facility.

Since this proposal for a narcotics center is a recent development we have not been able to fully consider the consequences of such an action.

We do know, however, that the narcotics patients and their families will be permitted to move freely between the Island and the mainland, requiring them to pass through City Island on each trip, as compared to the Bowery men who will be transported in enclosed vans. Consequently, we can expect considerable opposition from the residents of City Island, fearful of burgeoning illegal narcotics activities in their area, to a narcotics facility on Hart Island.

At this time our preferred use for Hart Island remains as a facility for homeless men.

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HART ISLAND

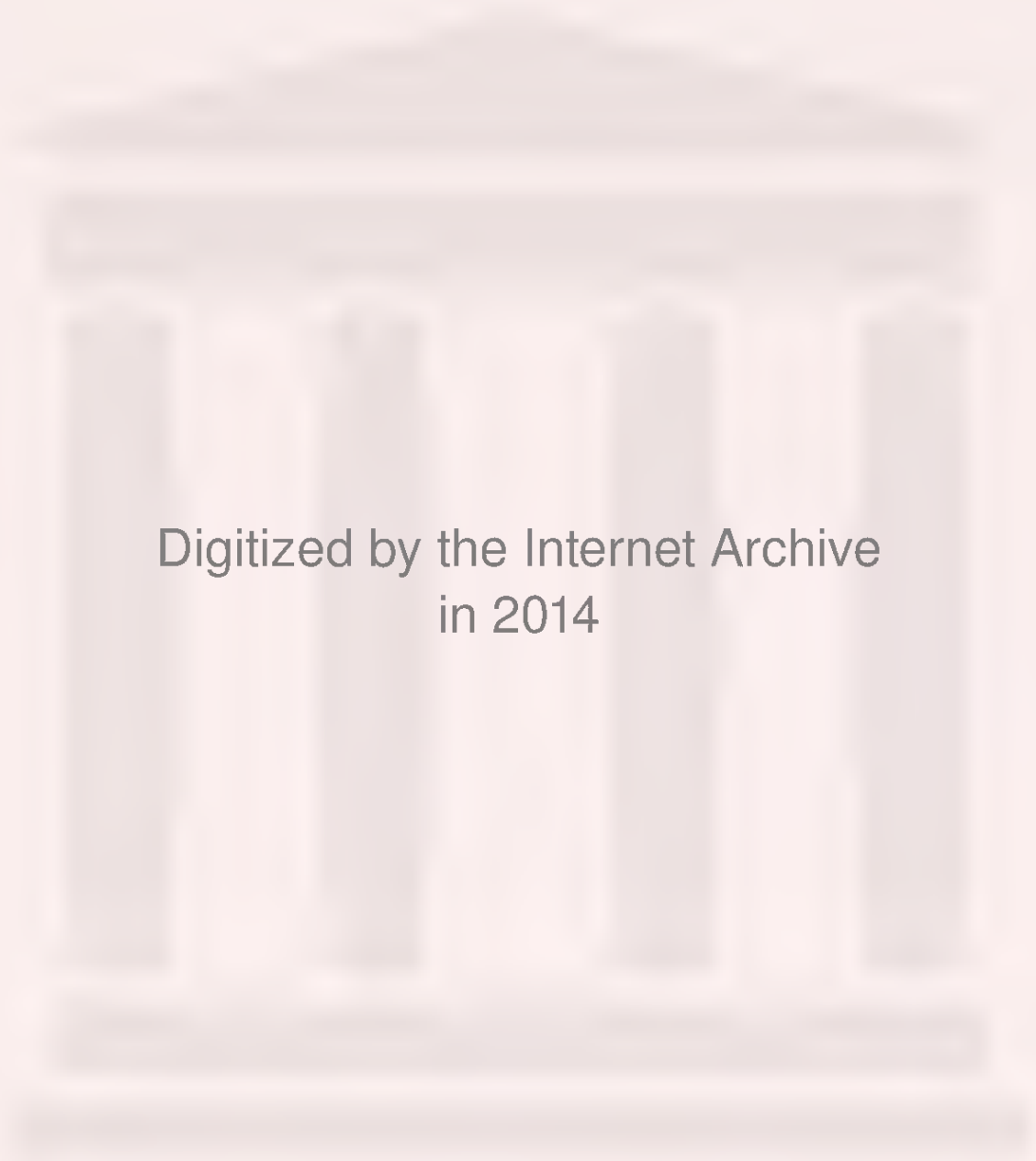
AN EVALUATION OF ALTERNATIVE USES

Division of Operations Planning

Edwin Friedman - Director

Bernard Levine - Planner

November 1966



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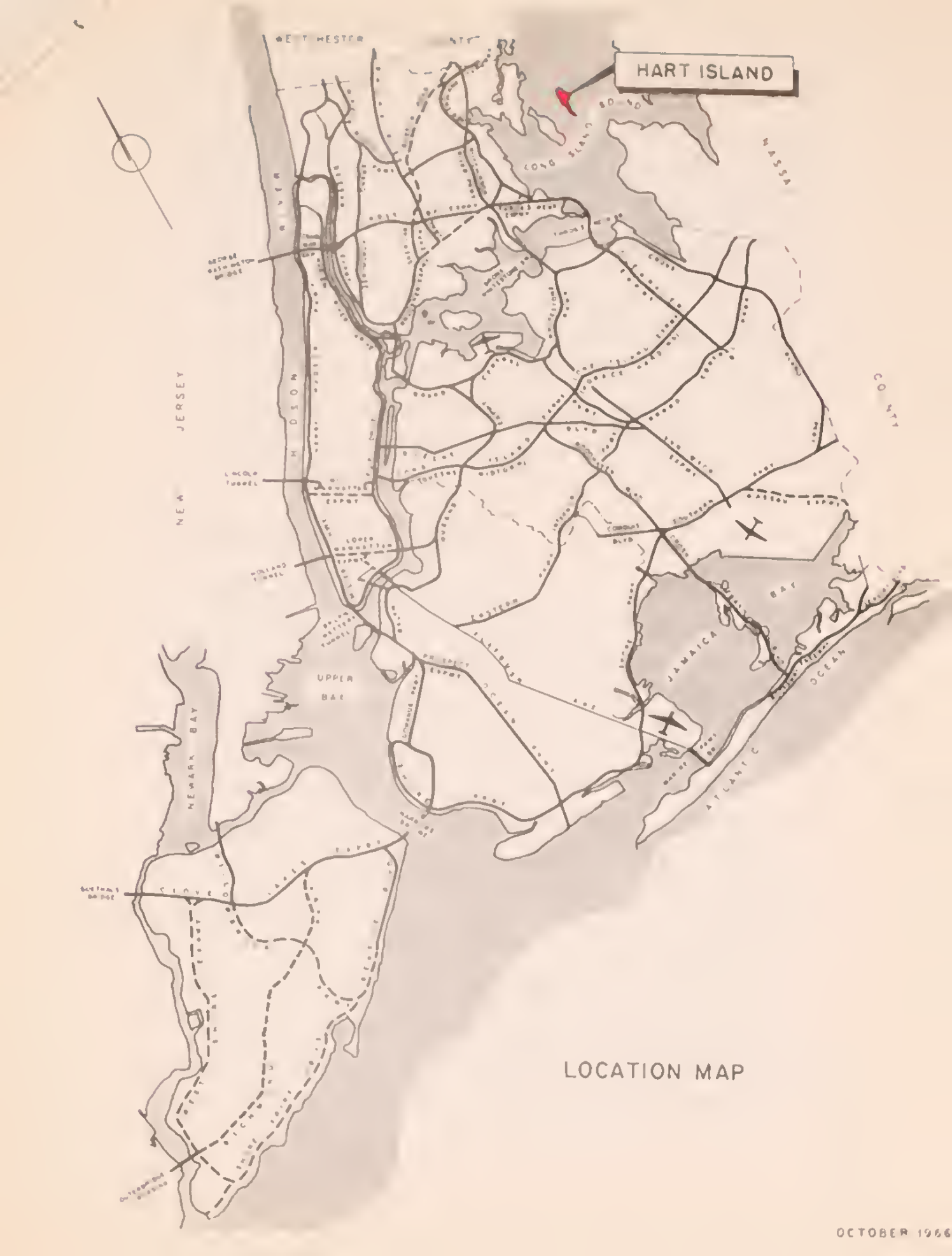

LOCATION MAP

OCTOBER 1966

I. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The City Planning Commission initiated this study of Hart Island to consider possible alternative uses as a result of the Department of Correction's decision to surrender its penal installations on the Island. The Department has recently completed the relocation of the Island's prisoner population to Rikers Island, and has made an official request to the Board of Estimate for the relinquishment of the Hart Island facility to the Department of Real Estate There are no budgetary funds provided for its continued operation in the City's budget for 1966-67

II. GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL FACTORS

Location and General Description

Hart Island is a 110 acre City-owned Island located in Long Island Sound, lying off the northeast coast of The Bronx It is accessible to the mainland via a seven minute ferry ride to City Island. The Island measures over a mile in length and a third of a mile at its widest dimension Its topography is varied, with the northern end of the Island characterized by hills and rises while the rest of the Island is predominantly level The mantle is covered with grass and dotted with stately trees The soil is fertile and, not so long ago, supported trees and vegetable farms, evidences of which are still visible today Seawalls surround the Island, most of them in good condition but in need of constant care against the ravages of the Sound The Island is laced with good under roads

History

Hart Island has been in City ownership since 1869 when it was purchased by the then Department of Charities and Correction for the expressed purpose of establishing an industrial school for destitute boys A Potters Field was also established on the Island at that time In 1895, the Island was placed under the jurisdiction of the Department of Correction, when the functions of the Department of Charities and Correction were separated Regulations for Potters Field continue to be made jointly with the Department of Welfare

Since its purchase, Hart Island has had two primary uses for the City--a shelter or correctional institution of some nature and a Potters Field

In 1955, the Army leased approximately 12 acres on the Island for a Nike Missile base, which was subsequently abandoned In 1962, the buildings of the abandoned missile base were used by the Department of Correction as an annex to the penal institution on the Island

III CURRENT USES AND STRUCTURES

The two major installations now on the Island are Potters Field and the abandoned Department of Correction Workhouse Plant The other noteworthy facilities are the small abandoned U S Army Nike area, portions of which were utilized by the Department of Correction, and a small Department of Public Works Sewage

Disposal Plant with a capacity of [illegible] and a half gallons per day which treats sewage from City and Hart Islands. The Police Department maintains a small pier on the Island.

A. Potters Field: Potters Field occupies approximately 2? acres in two locations. It uses approximately 25 acres on the northern end of the Island and about two acres on the southern tip, adjacent to the sewage treatment plant (see map).

Potters Field was opened on Hart Island in 1869 and in the intervening century has received well over half a million bodies. More than seven thousand adults and children were buried here in 1965 and 3,?75 were interred during the first five months of 1966. In order to handle new bodies, old graves, after a period of time sufficient to allow coffins and bodies to decompose, are opened, bones stacked and new bodies placed in the newly created spaces. This is a process which could go on indefinitely, the City using the same land over and over again for burials.

In the future the rate of opening old graves to accommodate new bodies may be slowed since the number of bodies to be interred in Potters Field may be reduced. Welfare Commissioner Mitchell I. Ginsberg is considering allowing $250 for the funeral and burial of persons on the welfare rolls who die destitute. This money would be sufficient to provide services and a grave in privately operated cemeteries

B. Workhouse: The Workhouse facilities consist of a number of differently sized buildings. The two largest structures, namely the Mess Hall and Kitchen building and the 14th Division building, have been condemned as unsafe

Most of the other buildings have been found to be structurally sound but will require rehabilitation and modernization if they are to be re-used.

There are three structurally sound large buildings which had housed the Workhouse population on a minimum security basis. These are:

Administration Building

A three-story and basement brick structure, having space for administrative offices and a sleeping dormitory capacity for 330 men on a single bed basis, with adequate bathing and toilet facilities.

Infirmary Building

A two-story and basement brick structure with a sick bay and clinic area on the first floor, and adjoining offices for physicians and nurses On the second floor are two dormitory areas capable of sleeping a total of 160 men on a single bed basis, with adequate bathing and toilet facilities. The basement contains a number of workshops, such as plumbing, tinsmith and carpentry among others.

12th Division Building

A one-story masonry structure, with three small wings, which is capable of housing 104 men on a single bed basis. The wings contain a chapel, library, small dining room and other service areas. The building has adequate toilets and showers.

There are also a number of satisfactory smaller brick and cinder block service buildings: including a powerhouse, laundry, chapel, recreation room.

C. U.S. Army Nike Area: When the Army abandoned this installation, buildings and some facilities were left which the Department of Correction found serviceable and subsequently put to use. These consist of twelve one-story metal siding and cinder block buildings in one contiguous area. Seven are barrack buildings, each capable of accommodating about 40

on Hart Island. This plant has a capacity to accommodating 1[illegible],000 people per day based upon standards of the Department of Public Works. According to the 1960 Census, 4,251 people live on City Island. Consequently the plant is capable of handling at least an additional 5,700 people.

This plant is a primary treatment plant. It permits the effluent to flow into Long Island Sound after it has been treated only with chlorine while the solids are pumped into sludge tanks for further treatment and then into drying beds.

By contract with the Interstate Sanitation Commission, New York City has agreed to abide by the stipulation that all City sewage would be given secondary treatment. If the Hart Island sewage treatment plant is not to be abandoned in the future it will be necessary for the City to modify it in order to make it capable of providing secondary sewage treatment. All of the sewage in a secondary treatment plant passes through more than one cycle of treatment prior to its being released into the water. The cost of converting this plant would run at least $1,500,000 at present estimates.

IV Alternative Possibilities

Whatever use is decided for Hart Island it will not be possible for the City to abandon the Island. In

powerhouse on the Island substructure to carry the supplies energy to the sewage plant graves will continue to be dug in Potters Field The transportation of workers and bodies requires the maintenance of the ferry service

A number of suggestions have been made for the re use of that portion of the Island which will be available:

Reserving the entire Island for an extended Potters Field

Reserving the existing facilities as a penal institution for emergency overflow from Rikers Island

Creating a summer camp for underprivileged children

Creating or reserving the Island as a regional park and recreation area.

Re-using existing structures for an educational institution of some kind.

Providing a rehabilitation and training center for alcoholic, homeless men.

A Making the Entire Island into a Potters Field

There appears to be no reason now to make additional land available for an expanded Potters Field The City presently is able to handle the yearly number of interments It is currently approved practice to use the same land for new graves after a period of time If the Department of Welfare revises its policy and allows lump-sum death benefits for the burial of relief recipients, the number of bodies interred each year is

Potters Field will be reduced. Although no statistics are available on the number of welfare recipients buried on the Island it is believed to be fairly large.

The State now allows a payment of $250 for the burial of welfare recipients, but the City had not authorized the release of these funds as a general practice. The City is re-evaluating this policy.

Also of note is that few Hebrews or Chinese are buried in Potters Field since voluntary societies cover the costs to members of these ethnic groups for whom there are no personal or family resources to pay the funeral expenses. In recent years, several Catholic organizations have started to provide such death services for indigent Catholics.

There is no doubt that the City will be the custodian of a Potters Field for many years to come. Space will always be needed to bury unclaimed bodies, stillborn babies and amputated limbs. However, it is reasonable to anticipate that the intensity of use and the rate of burials will decrease over the next few years, especially if lump-sum burial costs are available for welfare clients. As a consequence the future demand for cemetery land will be less than is presently required and the rate of trench openings for additional bodies will be slowed. There is no reason to reserve the entire Island for use

a larger proportion of the Island's land for an expanded Potters Field.

B. New Prison

The Department of Correction, in its evaluation of future penal requirements for New York City, had determined that there is no need for improving or enlarging the facilities on Hart Island. The Department believes that the completion of the present building program at Rikers Island will provide adequately for the City's presently estimated future prison population. Further, the overhead costs for prisoner maintenance on Rikers Island should be reduced as administrative and service facilities are shared among a larger prisoner population. Rikers Island also gives the Department flexibility in use of facilities as new needs arise.

The Department of Correction sees no future need for Hart Island and has irrevocably surrendered its commitment.

Informal discussion has disclosed that this official policy is not acceptable to a number of Department of Correction's staff members. Some believe that Correction should plan for contingencies by maintaining and keeping the Hart Island Workhouse plant available for prisoner use, since a sudden unexpected increase in the number of people to be jailed could overwhelm and tax the Rikers Island facilities.

It is their contention that Hart Island would remain available to meet any emergency if and when the need should arise. Also, they believe that it would be less costly for the City to invest money in maintaining the usable buildings on the Island than in making new capital expenditures in the future for additional facilities. The use of present Hart Island structures for homeless men would enable the City to consider this possibility should the need for prison expansion arise.

C. Summer Camp for Underprivileged Children

If it were not for Potters Field the Island might make an excellent site for a summer camp. The Island has trees, hills, swimming beaches and a variety of buildings available for re-use. The cost to the City of developing a camp here would be minimal.

However, the placing of children on an Island with a Potters Field, especially underprivileged children, is pyschologically and socially objectionable. It would be impossible to conceal the fact either from the children or from their parents that the Island does have a Potters Field, a place for society's outcasts.

The children and their parents would have reinforced a sense of exclusion from society, and feelings of degradation would be enhanced. Children at a facility on this Island would continuously have their thoughts focused on

destruction of the tragic ecology of the people buried on Hart Island.

Even though Potters Field could be fenced off from the rest of the Island, the existence of the cemetery could not be ridden because of the continuous burials and disinterments. Prisoners, bussed in from Rikers Island for digging and securing the burial trenches, also are visible, especially on their trips to and from the ferry.

Since Potters Field will continue in use, the Island is a most inappropriate place for children.

D Regional Park and Recreation Area

There is no doubt that the City can benefit from the creation of additional parks. What is doubtful is the appropriateness of Hart Island for such a use.

We do not believe that there exists a need for a park here at present. Directly across the Long Island Sound from Hart Island and attached to the mainland of The Bronx is the more than 2,000 acre Pelham Bay Park with a number of existing facilities.

To successfully develop a regional park on Hart Island will require the City to spend a good deal of money for planning and construction. It might be necessary for the City to span the 5,000 foot water gap between City and Island by building a bridge or causeway, an expenditure that could run

into millions of dollars. The [illegible] expenditure is not [illegible]

In addition, experience has shown that the City has had a notable lack of success in developing islands for recreation use. Wards and Randalls Islands, which are located only a few minutes away from major population centers and are linked to them by vehicular and pedestrian bridges, are severely underutilized. People are attracted to Randalls Island, arriving there by auto or bus, only during those infrequent times when the stadium has an appealing event. Wards Island, directly across the East River from East Harlem, serves as no magnet for large numbers of users although it has facilities lacking in Harlem, namely, grass, trees, athletic playing fields and picnic areas.

Traffic to Hart Island would, by necessity, have to move through City Island on its one major street. This street is now congested particularly during the summer months, the peak season for the use of parks and recreation areas.

The residents of City Island have expressed opposition to a bridge or causeway connecting their Island with Hart Island. They do not want traffic, which is destined for Hart Island, moving through City Island. They have also expressed opposition to large numbers of people arriving on City Island, parking their cars and taking a ferry to [illegible] recreation space on Hart Island. There is a lack of available parking spaces in the area adjacent to the City Island ferry slip.

A park would require the removal of the Potter's Field, an undertaking which would present problems of new acquisition of space without any essential benefits. The continuation of the Potters Field and other public facilities does not foreclose future reconsideration for park use.

E Educational Institution

Hart Island's peripheral location and lenghtly travel time necessary to reach make it an undesirable site for an educational institution. The Island is not near major population areas. Students, in order to reach the Island, will have to undertake a long journey involving a number of different travel modes--train, bus and ferry. Very few of the existing facilities on the Island could be used for an educational plant. The City would have to construct a number of new facilities. Capital construction funds for education could be more usefully employed elsewhere. Previous observations above in IV-C and IV-D are also relevant objections.

F Rehabilitation and Training Center - Operation Bowery

New York City, during the past few years, has been conducting a research program and improved service program for homeless men who have a rehabilitation potential and are capable of being restored to useful and productive lives. The research program has provided new insights into the life styles and

needs of different classifications of homeless men. Some new services have been introduced and existing services expanded. One of the services which has received approval and for which the City's Capital Budget has provided funds is a residential facility for the rehabilitation and training of 600 homeless men.

The Alcoholic Rehabilitation and Training Center appears to be the most appropriate, the most reasonable and the most economical The City's Capital Budget provides funds for a center and the Department of Welfare's Operation Bowery has been searching for the proper area in which to locate. The former Riverside Hospital on North Brothers Island, where it was believed such facility would be feasible, requires considerably more funds for conversion than have been allocated, and higher operating costs

The City will benefit in a number of ways by permitting Operation Bowery to assume the responsibility for the Hart Island plant It will be matching still useful buildings, which otherwise might be abandoned, with an important social program to meet the needs of homeless men more satisfactorily. It will relieve the City of some problems now endemic to the Bowery section of lower Manhattan particularly and encourage the redevelopment of the area south of 14th Street to a higher use

The City has, over the years, invested large sums of money in developing correctional facilities on Hart Island, with all the necessary service structures including workshops and indoor and

outdoor recreation facilities. This investment can continue to return benefits to the City instead of being foreclosed while larger capital outlays would be required elsewhere

The facilities of the former penal institution and Nike Base easily lend themselves to conversion to an Alcoholic Rehabilitation and Training Center. The Barracks which housed most of the prisoners are still usable The appearance of the buildings and their interiors are more like an adult camp rather than a prison compound.

Little major conversion of the buildings will be required by Operation Bowery, and most of this may be accomplished with the assistance of Island labor.

Operation Bowery will be maintaining the buildings on the Island If the need for additional prison facilities should ever arise this would not foreclose using Hart Island for this purpose again If these buildings are completely abandoned now, it is not likely that they could be economically returned to any use in the future

It is recommended, therefore, that Hart Island be turned over to the Department of Welfare for use by Operation Bowery as a rehabilitation and training center for homeless men who are alcoholic

This would not interfere with the continued use of Potter's Field It also would safeguard the City's investment in usable capital structures which would quickly deteriorate if abandoned

without regard to any of the alternatives considered

1 Provision must be made for the required modification of the sewage treatment plant on the Island

2 The unsafe buildings on the Island should be demolished

The proposal to use Hart Island, and re-use the existing facilities on the Island, as a rehabilitation center for homeless men has merit Hart Island was used from 1950 to 1954 by the Department of Welfare as a facility for homeless men with a program of physical and vocational restoration An alcoholism treatment program was about to start when the Island was released back to the Department of Correction to meet an acute shortage of prison facilities.

The Committee on Public Health of the New York State Bar Association in its report on December 31, 1956, concerning alcoholism, referred to the Welfare Department's Hart Island project as "one of the most hopeful rehabilitation efforts in our time" and regretted the "obliteration" of the "notable establishment of a rehabilitation center at Hart Island". At the peak of its operation Hart Island had over 600 men enrolled

It is now possible to once again re-establish on the Island the program that was aborted back in 1954 The physical facilities exist to support such a program. The City will not be required to expend more than presently allocated capital funds for conversion of the Island's structures to this use * At one time 600 men

* Information provided by Operation Starr, based on estimate made by Public Works

could be housed on a single-bed basis if the usable dormitory buildings. The service buildings could continue to perform their same functions. Adequate facilities for indoor and outdoor recreation and leisure-time pursuits are available.

Until Hart Island became available North Brother Island was under consideration as the site for a residential Operation Bowery program. According to sources concerned with setting up such a program, Hart Island is eminently more suitable since the buildings on North Brother Island have deteriorated to a degree where major repair requiring a considerably larger capital investment than budgeted is necessary. Also, the City would have to initiate a ferry run between the Island and mainland, estimated to cost about $100 daily.

The residents of City Island will not oppose a rehabilitation center on the Island. The President of the City Island Civic Association has informed us that there would be no objection to the use of the Island for alcoholics, provided that City Island serves only as a transportation corridor to and from Hart Island.

It is possible for the program to start immediately on Hart Island. There is money available for the provision of necessary supplies, furniture and equipment. A sum of $[illegible], which had been allocated in the 1966-67 Capital Budget for the renovation of North Brother Island, is transferable to Hart Island.